The Redlighting of Dumont.

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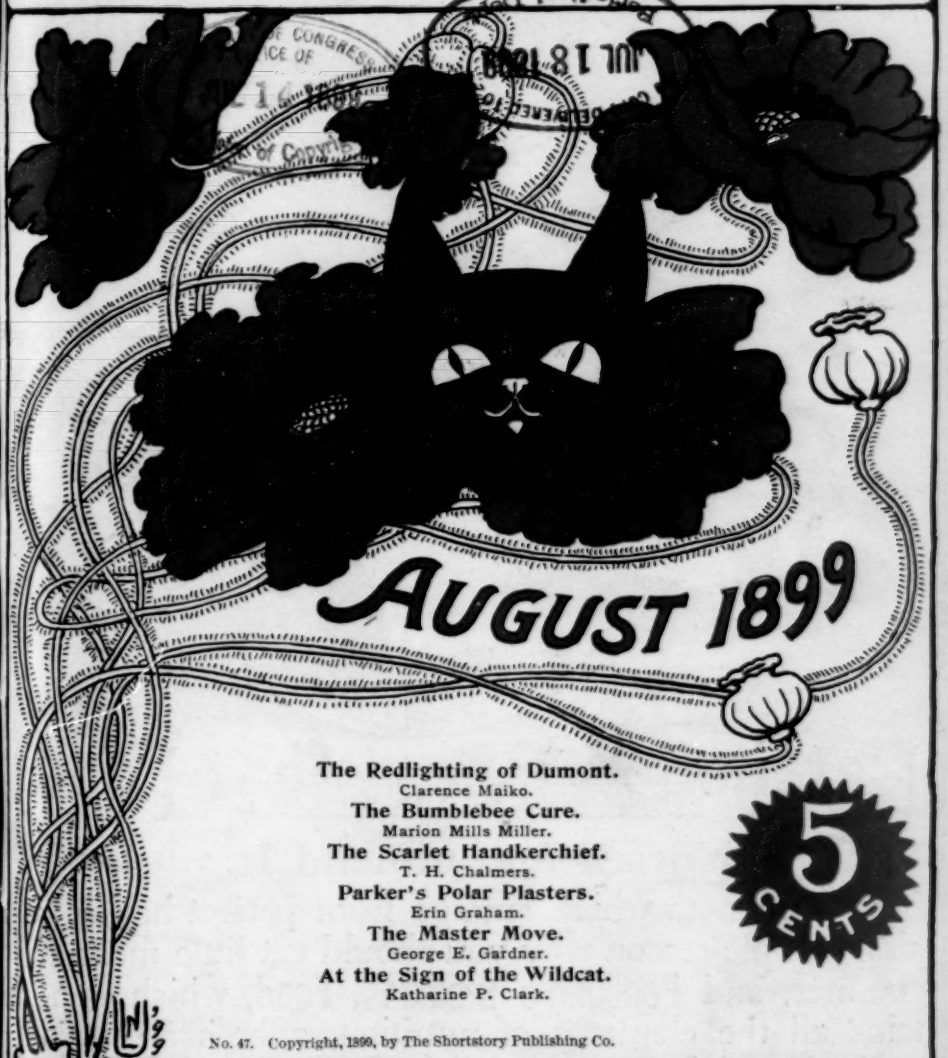
The Black Cat



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The Redlighting of Dumont.*

BY CLARENCE MAIKO.

MY friend, the press agent, used to tell of an old lady who came to the ticket-wagon one afternoon and inquired in a manner sincere and ingenuous: "When do you circus people sleep?"

The response was laconic: "In the winter, Madam — in the winter."

It was even so; this circus press agent hibernated in our quiet town of Xenia. Sometimes, on bright afternoons, he became roused sufficiently to drop in at the club, and bore us with all manner of impossible tales about somnambulistic goats and hypnotic monkeys, and reminiscences of a rheumatic elephant that was as good as a barometer in forecasting atmospheric disturbances. But one day the press agent so far forgot himself as to tell a story which was distinctly unprofessional:

For a trapeze artist or a bareback rider to lose his nerve is bad enough, but for a tamer of wild beasts to tremble in the knees, means death. I would rather play the cake of ice and double in Brass in an Uncle Tom show, than go into a den of the tamest lions that were ever worked.

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Years ago, when I was more of a vagabond than I am now, I had the misfortune to be employed by a man named Kinsella, who was the prince of frauds in the circus profession. He carried two sets of printing, and when the work of his short-change men and his bunco-experts brought the circus into ill-repute, he would wire the advertising manager, ahead in car No. 1, to "switch the paper."

So sometimes we were "Kinsella's Great Consolidated Shows" and at other times we were "The Western Hippodrome and Mammoth Animal Show." In brief, Kinsella's was what is known to the circus world as a "grafting show."

With us was a fellow called Dumont, who worked the lions. One day, while going into the den, he scratched his hand; a lioness, scenting the blood, sprang at him and half killed him before they could get him out. After that, Dumont lost his nerve.

Next season, just before we opened, he turned up with a young girl. He told Kinsella that he was going to quit working the lions, and that his protégée, the young girl, would take his place in the den.

The girl proved a wonder. She was billed as Mlle. Nina, and her act was the best thing in the show.

Dumont posed as her manager. He took her into the ring and handed her into the lions' den every night, standing by with an iron bar to lend a hand in case anything went wrong.

She was not beautiful, that Nina, only her eyes — they were two lights of flashing, tawny brown. If she looked long at a lion, it would come and fawn at her feet and whine, as if in pain. And if she looked long at a man — well, she never looked at any man long, like that, except Dumont.

When Dumont first met her, a ragged slip of a girl in the city streets, he said, "A girl with eyes like those, and a pure heart, can cow a tiger."

There are some queer things, you see, about this wild-beast taming.

That girl was without fear. She seemed to have no nerves to feel; every night she grew more bold; she did things with those lions that sometimes made us turn cold with fright. Kinsella added a Bengal tiger to her den of lions, and she made a fool of that tiger. One night, however, the brute turned on her with

a hiss and grinding of his jaws. It was only for a moment, but Dumont fell on his face in the sawdust outside. The girl saw him fall and left the cage; and when Dumont awoke, he knew that a woman had come between his heaven and his earth.

Then Dumont found out how it is for a man to crucify himself; for his life was — was — the life of a man who has to see the woman he loves face death every night.

We had been changing names at every town we played. Kinsella was under a cloud, because of his fathering a gang of pickpockets. Kinsella was a man who would stop at nothing to gain his ends with man or woman. He was one of those men who believed that the only way to use people is to abuse them; yet, to the waifs that drifted in among us, to the roustabouts — poor devils who had lost all track of time and place, and to women — especially to women — Kinsella was a demigod. He was a big, darkish, handsome man, and at night when he took the center of the ring, in black full-dress, lit up with all his diamonds, he was worth looking at.

Perhaps Mlle. Nina had looked at him then, as she looked at the Bengal tiger when he turned on her; or maybe her indifference to his grandeur, and her obvious affection for Dumont, had piqued him; at any rate, everybody, even down to the candy butchers and the song-book hawkers, noted Kinsella's studied attention to the girl.

I do not say Kinsella was in love with her, for I think he was hardly capable of a decent affection. But who knows where to draw the line between love and passion in some men? One thing is certain, it would require a miracle of heaven to make Kinsella's love like that of Dumont.

We were playing a route of country towns in the Southwest, and day after day slipped by without anything of importance happening. Kinsella's Great Consolidated Shows had been having bad luck, and several diamonds were missing from the shirt front of the proprietor. Business was growing poorer every day; a march behind us there was generally a sheriff with a writ, and we became known as "The Shows That Pass in the Night."

All this time Dumont, poor wretched man, was bleeding under the crown of thorns that the love of a woman had woven for him.

One afternoon he reached the climax of his suffering, and going to Kinsella he told his story, and confessed that he was unable to bear with his present life any longer.

I do not think any words had been spoken between Dumont and the girl; both were of a kind of people who have little need of words, or the empty conventions of society. He was a very simple man, that Dumont, and he took himself quite seriously. Kinsella was astonished when Dumont gave notice that Mlle. Nina would quit working the lions at the end of the month. What Kinsella said does not matter. I know how he must have felt, for Mlle. Nina was the only support of the Great Consolidated Shows.

We made a long jump that night in a train across Texas. Along past midnight a little scream came from the stateroom occupied by Nina. Kinsella, myself, and others quickly went to her door. The girl threw the door open. She was very much excited, and we were shocked, for we had never seen her so before.

"Did you hear that cry?" she questioned, and her eyes went through us all. "Did you hear that cry? O Mr. Kinsella, stop the train! I think something has happened to Dumont."

"My dear girl," said Kinsella soothingly, "calm yourself; nothing is wrong, I assure you. You have been dreaming."

"I never dream," she went on, bending forward, and her eyes searched the depths of Kinsella's soul. "I heard a cry — a cry outside in the night. It was Dumont's voice. He was calling me, and he said, 'Nina! Nina! O Nina!' It was terrible — I will never forget it — that cry." Then she suddenly flashed out, "Where is Dumont? Bring him here."

There was an embarrassed silence; no one could answer; everybody looked around for Dumont. Then some one who had gone to look in Dumont's berth at the end of the car shouted: "Well, Mr. Kinsella, it's rather queer, but Dumont is not here."

Some of the women took the girl in charge, and began mothering her. Kinsella and the man went through the train from front to rear, looking for Dumont. It was soon evident that he was not on the train. Presently the train stopped at a small station for water. Kinsella stepped out and went into the telegraph office. Before the train started he returned with a dispatch, which he handed to Nina. She read it, and, without making a single com-

ment, gave it back to Kinsella. Then she walked into her stateroom — steady, calm, impassive, and locked herself in.

After she had gone, Kinsella read the telegram aloud to us all. It seemed to be from the operator in the last station we had stopped at:

"The man you inquire for was here. He bought a ticket and left on the eastbound at 9.30. Was heard to remark that he was sick of your show."

We never heard from Dumont again. His sudden departure caused surprise to no one. Such things happen so often with a circus that one becomes accustomed to them, and no one thought it queer, except, perhaps, the girl Nina. And, of course, she told no one what she thought, or how she felt. When a woman has been deeply wounded in heart she does not say so — she does not admit it. Nina was a woman, and like all women at heart, in spite of her iron nerve and her commanding eye. This she showed by the change that came over her. She became reckless and indifferent. In the cage she threw all precaution to the winds. Kinsella had to protest, for she would hurl her whip to the far end of the den and make the Bengal tiger fetch it to her.

We went North, and in the big towns the people were crazy over Nina's daring. Kinsella found himself suddenly growing rich. Nina became a gold mine so precious that Kinsella had a small gun concealed under the cage, and every night he stood beside it, ready to act the instant it should be required. Because the Bengal tiger was a trifle cross one afternoon, Kinsella foolishly prodded him with a pitch-fork. Beasts have a curious memory for these little persecutions, and the tiger did not forget.

All this time the girl was never heard to mention Dumont's name. Kinsella made love to her, of course, but he might as well have made love to a death mask. If he pestered her too much, she would look at him as she looked at the Bengal tiger when the beast became sulky, and she mastered the man just as she mastered the beast.

She was the goose that laid the golden eggs — that Nina. The Great Consolidated had to change its name no longer. Every one received his pay, and the diamonds which decked Kinsella's shirt front became stupendous.

It was very plain to me that Mlle. Nina was taking too many chances in the den with her lions and her Bengal tiger, and that some night there would be a yellow flash, a horrid crunching, and the crowd would look away and groan, all of which things would happen before Kinsella could make a motion to save the woman who was his fortune, and whom he hungered for. His eyes never left her while she was in the den of beasts, and perhaps he came to realize how Dumont felt when the man went to him with his misery that afternoon.

There was one thing connected with Dumont's disappearance of which I often thought — one thing that made me very curious, I might almost say suspicious — it was that cry in the night which the girl said she had heard. Surely an unimaginative woman like Nina, with her icy command of every nerve, had some ground for saying that she heard Dumont's voice calling to her, "Nina! Nina! O Nina!" — that cry in the night which roused her from her sleep; that despairing appeal which she heard above the roar and crash of the rushing train. Ah! but was it heard? It may have been only an impression — the result of some vivid dream.

There came for us, at length, one momentous night when this and many other things were all made clear. The Great Consolidated Shows had been playing a week's stand in a large Southern city. It occurred to me one evening that on this very night, a year ago, Dumont had disappeared. We had been friendly, Dumont and I, and before the girl came and filled his heart we had been much together.

It was the beginning of our season. We were working practically the same territory that we had gone over a year ago. The show was practically the same show as of old, except that Nina was a circus star, and her name in big letters on our printing now drew thousands of people.

After eating supper, I strolled over to the ticket-wagon and amused myself watching the great crowd that stood about the lot outside, beguiled by the fakirs and the manifold sights of the circus exterior. There was a jostling black river of people, pushing through the main-way under the flaring gasoline torches, all eager to see a girl make lions jump through paper hoops, and to see a Bengal tiger fetch and carry like a poodle dog.

Among the faces in the crowd that passed by, I suddenly caught sight of the face of Dumont. Forcing my way through the crowd, I hastened to the connection between the menagerie and the big-top, through which Dumont would have to pass, and I waited. There was plenty of light. I could see distinctly every person passing through the connection. Presently I saw Dumont coming, and I placed myself directly in his way.

"Hello, Dumont!" I said to him pleasantly, "so you have concluded to visit your old friends once more."

I was within two feet of him when I spoke. He looked blankly into my face, just as though some unknown stranger had taken the liberty of addressing him. I saw by the vacant stare that he did not know me. It was strange, for Dumont was not a man to give old friends such a greeting. He was with a party of some ten or twelve men, piloted by a large man who walked ahead with the tickets. I followed them into the big-top, where they took seats in the first tier above the ring. There was a vacant seat near Dumont, and I went down and seated myself in it, but my old friend utterly ignored my proximity.

The brass band was braying provokingly an ancient circus march, the composite voice of the circus crowd was growing into a dull roar, and the place was oppressed by a blending of odors of pine sawdust, hay and wild animals, characteristic and peculiar to every circus.

Dumont seemed wrapped in a kind of dream, as he rolled his dull, troubled eyes around over this old familiar scene. As I watched him, the suspicion that he was not right in the head strengthened into a conviction.

"Monty, Monty, old chap," I whispered, leaning over and using the old friendly diminutive, "don't you know me, Monty?"

The fanfare of the trumpeters, precursors of the grand *entrée* of the circus *cortége*, interrupted me, but I could have said no more, for Dumont, after fixing his vacant gaze on me for a moment, turned stonily away. In his face I could see the struggle of a great trouble.

Turning to the tall man who seemed to be in charge of Dumont's party, I said in a low tone:

"Pardon me, sir, but will you tell me the name of this member

of your party? I thought I recognized in him an old acquaintance, but he does not seem to know me," and I tapped my forehead significantly.

"Oh, No. 52?" answered the man, and then, perceiving my perplexed expression, he added: "He's all right — you needn't be afraid of him. We're from the State Asylum, where I'm an assistant. He wouldn't harm anybody. Just simple — that's all. Some farmer picked him up and brought him to us a year ago. He don't know a thing — been hurt in the head, the doctors think."

The march was in progress, a glittering pageant, dragging around the great ring and vanishing into the dim region whence it had issued.

I turned again to Dumont, who was like a man deep in a trance. One by one the familiar faces of people we had worked with and with whom we had often shared both food and money passed by, arrayed in gaudy parade tinsel — marching to the strains of the same old circus march.

The den of lions rolled ponderously along in the rear. Nina did not appear in the procession — an exemption from circus parade duty being one of the many privileges her success commanded. But Kinsella was there, ablaze with his monstrous diamonds, splendid and grand. When he passed us Dumont's eyes lightened for the first time. The trouble worked in his face and his lips moved. I strained to catch his words; they were incoherent, as the words that a man mutters in his dreams:

"The red lights — lights, red lights that go by. The red lights — that go by in the night."

Then he pressed his hands to his head and followed Kinsella with his eyes until the tall figure of the manager left the ring.

As the show progressed, the trouble in the face of Dumont deepened. He was under some terrible strain, and I could see that he was becoming more feverish and excited every minute. Several times he broke out with mutterings about red lights — red lights that went by in the night. And suddenly the explanation dawned upon me. Dumont had been "Redlighted" — every circus man knows what that means. Kinsella had thrown him off our train on that night-run a year ago. And Kinsella was just the

kind of a man to do such a thing, if it suited his purpose. The red lights! Poor Dumont — all his battered head had been able to retain was the recollection of those red lights that had gone by in the night — the red lights streaming from the rear platform of our train as it vanished in the night, leaving a man with a broken head lying on the Texas prairie.

So that cry in the night — that cry which sent terror to the heart of the girl who loved Dumont — was, after all, a reality, not an illusion.

I sat speculating on the cruel fraud that Kinsella had perpetrated on the girl — on the clever way in which he had duped her into believing that she had been deserted — and upon the awful results of his work upon Dumont, who seemed a dithering simpleton, as a consequence of that fall from the moving train.

Dumont kept up his plaintive patter about the perplexing red lights, and I myself was almost as abstracted as Dumont. The performances in the ring went by quite unheeded by us, and the end of hours drew on unconsciously to me and to the poor stuttering wretch beside me.

The clamor of the crowd became hushed, a low murmur of expectancy filled the air, and I felt that an event was about to happen.

In the centre of the ring was a great cage, and within it were two lions and tigers, ceaselessly beating to and fro, growling in low thunders, and yawning with their thick, pendulous red jaws, which were rimmed with gleaming, white incisors.

Dumont stopped his dribbling talk and clapped his hands to his head. Something was going on in his brain, for his expressionless face and empty eyes were slowly lighting. The people around us were too much interested in what was going to happen in the ring to pay any attention to Dumont. For myself, I was too much interested in the change that was working in Dumont's head to note, except in a vague way, what was to occur in the ring.

It was no novelty for me to behold Mlle. Nina run lightly into the great circle of sawdust, kissing her hands to the waiting thousands that hemmed the ring, tier on tier. I can shut my eyes and see it all now. There was Kinsella, bowing and smiling, towering above her in black and white, resplendent with his diamonds,

holding the tips of her fingers as he walked with her to the lions' den. Every detail of the scene I knew — even how and where the round, blotchy shadows fell on the white sawdust — the shadows thrown by the big gasoline torches high up under the walls of the great hollow cone.

Then, suddenly, Dumont started from his seat. He rose very slowly, in a kind of daze, his hands pressed tightly to his forehead. I knew what had happened — Nina had entered the ring.

A soft whisper of surprise ran through the crowd, like the passing of a breeze; it was always so when Nina entered the ring. Then there was a breathless silence as Nina stood before the door of the lions' den. Kinsella himself always swung the door open for her to go in, and shut it after her and slid the lock-bar in place.

I did not see him do it that night, except vaguely, out of the corner of my eye. The light that was breaking over Dumont's face, as he rose slowly up, up, from his seat beside me, held me in enchantment. A mystery was untying itself, and in the presence of this working of Providence I was awed and reverential.

What came next was a cry. A great, sobbing cry went out in that moment of breathless silence and stirred every human heart in the circle of densely peopled seats. Dumont's brain had started again — just where it left off a year ago — and in accents that told five thousand people how much of love and how much of pain can be crowded into a few short seconds of this human life, he called:

"Nina! Nina! O Nina!"

Down in the center of the ring Kinsella had swung open the door of the lions' den, and the girl was in the act of stepping into the cage.

It was a moment of the most intense feeling for all.

The tightly-stretched canvas dome above acted like a vast sounding-board and echoed back, in a vibrating pæan of love and pain, that cry in the night: "Nina! Nina! O Nina!"

The girl had paused, white and stricken, in the door of the cage. She swayed to and fro and the wild beasts stopped their restless pacing and glared at her wonderingly. To me everything became misty.

Then, suddenly, a mighty groan went up from the throats of

five thousand people, who turned their eyes away from the centre of the ring, dreading to look there longer. The girl fell fainting in the door of the lions' den.

I saw Dumont leap over the ropes into the ring. I heard a thousand shouts: "Take her out, take her out!" as a score of attendants rushed toward the den. But Kinsella was the nearest and the first man to reach her, lying in the door of the cage. He forgot, however, that a tiger has a memory. As he was bending over to lift her, there was a flashing streak of yellow and a sickening noise. The Bengal tiger impaled Kinsella on the floor of the den. Women shrieked hysterically; men groaned and shouted.

In the den there was an awful tableau. The tiger stood gloating over his work in the centre of the cage, while the lions shrank back from their fellow-beast, eying him with dignified contempt. The girl lay unconscious and white in the door for a second — then twenty men with iron bars broke in on the tableau.

Nina was taken out of the den without difficulty, Dumont himself lifting her from the cage. But they had to beat the beast off Kinsella in order to drag him out. I reached the centre of the ring, just in time to hear some physician remark: "Oh, no; he won't die, though he might as well." Kinsella lived, but he was injured so badly in the throat that he could never again curse any man or whisper soft lies to any woman.

Then that punishment, which must have been the bitterest of all, came to Kinsella. He opened his eyes and his first words were: "Nina — Nina — where is Nina?"

There was a movement in the throng standing about the cage, the babel subsided, and the crowd opened a little, leaving a small clear space, where men pointed with their fingers, saying softly, "Look — over there." Kinsella turned painfully and looked; the men about the cage looked; even the five thousand people in the audience looked; and they saw a woman, whose face was transfigured, put her arms up to a man bending over her and draw his head slowly down — that she might reach his lips.

The Bumblebee Cure.*

BY MARION MILLS MILLER.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, there lived in a village of southern Ohio two boys so coupled in every condition of youthful existence, whether of mischief or measles, that the whole neighborhood, including their respective parents, made no distinction between them. It is true that the Engelharts and the "Waterses" possessed separate, though adjacent, homes, but "Dolph and Dicky" were present indifferently at either of the places at meal and bed time, or were shrewdly absent from both when work was to be done. If Mrs. Engelhart ran out of "risin'" and called for Dolph to run to the brewery at the other end of the town for a "settin'" of "jug yeast," it was almost certain to happen that both Dolph and the jug were missing, "gone off with Dicky Waters" on some extended expedition to the fields. Or if Mr. Waters beheld the destruction wrought among his "Early Rose" potatoes by the new pest, the Colorado beetle, and came glowering to the house for Dick's assistance in "Buggin' the vines"—a back-breaking task, consisting in crushing the beetles and their eggs between wooden paddles—he was sure to be "riled" beyond even a deacon's endurance by the doubly exasperating news that both Dicky and the paddles had joined Dolph and the jug in an outing that promised to end only at dusk.

For Dolph and Dicky were inveterate bumblebee fighters, and the jug and paddles were their most efficient armament. With the former they bottled the flying squadrons of their yellow-banded foes, and with the latter they "smashed" the stray guerillas hastening home to the conflict. The boys cruised around a clover field, poking at the fence corners, until they discovered a nest of bumblebees. Then they set the open jug, half-filled with water, a

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foot or so in front of the entrance, gave the nest a vigorous thrust or two, and retired with their paddles about a rod away, to look out for strays, and watch the infuriated home guards proceed to "bottle" themselves, according to the tactics long subsequently made famous by a Spanish admiral.

Out of the nest the bees would come raging, make straight for the jug, and circle spirally upward around its smooth sides until they came to its mouth. Then, "buz-z-z, zoop! buz-z-z, zoop!" down they went, one by one into the jug, until all the fighters in the nest were cooling their ardor in the water within.

Dolph and Dicky ascribed this seemingly suicidal policy to the attraction for the bee of that round reflection of the sky which, seen through the neck of a jug, has something of the appearance of a human eye. Every boy knows that a fighting-mad bumblebee makes straight for the eye of his enemy, from which circumstance arises the name "eye-bunger," as applied to the veteran fighting bumblebees, to distinguish them from the clumsy workers so laden with the communal food supply as to be practically harmless.

After the last efficient warrior had been jugged, the boys proceeded to rifle the nest. By long experience they had learned to distinguish between the whitish cells wherein reposed the young, unhatched bees, and the amber-hued ones which served as honey-jars. The former they left undisturbed. Part of the latter they put to their lips, careless of stray grains of soil, the slight earthy taste of which could little impair the exceeding rich flavor of the honey, and squeezed the contents, each a single golden globe that was a world of sweetness, into the cup made by the curving tongue-tip. The rest of the honey-cells they tied carefully in a handkerchief to carry home in propitiation to their parents.

Last of all, they poured out the contents of the jug in a sunshiny spot, in order that the bedraggled bees might revive and refill the looted nest, to be rifled again by the boys later in the season. After one bee fortress had been sacked in this systematic fashion, Dick would go prospecting for another, while Dolph made a trip for more water to the nearest stream or farmhouse, usually a much greater distance than the hated journey from his home to the brewery.

In this fashion they spent the long summer day, returning at dark with only an occasional sting upon which their parents could logically base an injunction upon the pastime. But a plaster of wet baking soda soon cured the tiny wound, and a sharing of the sweet spoil with anxious mother and irate father who, being country-bred, still loved a reminder of their youthful pleasures, easily procured a postponement of the impending interdict.

But one morning Dick's father, who so rarely threatened that Dick had never dared to disobey him, quietly assured the bee-hunter that if the potato bugs did not receive their full share of attention that day from him and his paddles, the latter instruments would be turned against his own person in a fashion that he would long remember. So Dick went to work with a very dismal face, which was soon lightened up, however, by Dolph's appearance upon the scene and his offer of assistance.

For a while it was a pleasure to smash the hard-winged beetles and "squush" their soft-bodied progeny, now beginning to hatch from the neglected eggs, but the potato rows seemed endless, and the bending posture of the boys began to grow intolerable, so that Dicky finally straightened up with the exclamation, "Oh, dad-burn the blame bugs!"

Dolph, who only needed a suggestion to fire his inventive mind, responded:

"That's it, Dicky, we'll do it!"

"Do what?" asked Dick.

"Why, burn the bugs," replied Dolph. "We'll get our old wash-pan, half fill it with coal-oil, knock the bugs into it with our paddles, put in sawdust, and have a bonfire. 'Twon't be cruel, 'cause the oil will drown 'em senseless, and they'll be burnt up before they knows it. If they ain't dead, it'll serve 'em right for playin' 'possum." They had observed that the potato bug, when disturbed, will draw in his legs and remain for some time motionless.

The new plan worked admirably, with four times the rapidity of the old method, and in a short time enough bugs had been collected to form the first *auto-da-fé*. So down they went to the Waters' wood-yard for combustibles, carrying the pan of bugs and the oil can. Here they found sawdust in plenty, but it was too

damp to ignite, even when soaked with kerosene. All the chips had long ago disappeared from the bare space, gathered by the boys themselves to kindle kitchen fires. But in the corner of the lot, by the board fence next the alley, was a rank growth of catnip and wild mustard which undoubtedly hid many a splinter from the vigorous axe of Mr. Waters. Into this tangle the boys plunged together, and out of it they came with simultaneous, but diverse, discoveries.

"Bumblebees!" cried Dick, and Dolph held up a jug half-filled with a liquid whose odor proclaimed it whiskey.

Now, these events took place in the days of the "Crusade," a movement inaugurated by "Mother" Stewart and other Ohio ladies, against the liquor traffic. The wives and daughters of a village would go about from one drinking place to another, singing and praying in front of each, and stationing, when they departed, two of their number as "pickets" to take down the names of all persons entering the saloon. In the face of such organized publicity, it was only a very hardened or very independent man who passed the picket lines. For a time, back doors gave access to old customers, but the vigilance of watchers from overlooking piazzas or other points of vantage, soon cut off this method of secret access to the daily dram. So recourse was finally had by confirmed town topers to jugs hidden in convenient and secluded spots, known only to the initiated.

It was upon such a resort that the boys had stumbled.

Both lads were among the staunchest teetotalers in the village, and Dick's mother was a crusader. They even gave the brewery as wide a berth as possible to avoid its unholy odor of hops. Holding such Puritanic views, it was not strange that they proceeded upon their first impulse, uncorked the jug, and, holding their noses, poured the whiskey out on the ground, only to repent of their precipitancy when they thought of the bumblebees. What a lark it would have been to jug the bees in the liquor and then watch them "come to life" as drunk as Dolph's chickens were when they ate brandy-soaked fruit from which his mother had strained her cherry bounce. Dolph's mother had some old-country notions, not in line with the convictions of the class to which Mrs. Waters belonged.

However, there was the kerosene, and the boys were just Neroes enough to delight in a variety of victims for the coming holocaust. So they half filled the whiskey jug with the oil, put it back uncorked in its hiding place in the fence corner, then jumped over into the alley, and, by violently shaking the fence post, in the rotting base of which the bees had built their nest, roused the inmates to sally forth on the other side against their supposed enemy, the jug.

But when the boys were about to return to watch the result of their manœuvre they were deterred by the appearance of Colonel Corcoran, whom they at once divined to be on a visit to the secret abiding place of his cherished comrade and only enemy — John Barleycorn. In earlier and more sober days the colonel had been the pride of the community, first as a gallant officer in the Civil War, and later as a representative of the district in Congress, and though he had fallen grievously from his high estate, he still carried himself with a soldierly bearing and faced the world with a calm, if suspiciously florid countenance, that commanded the respect of even Dolph and Dicky, who looked on a drunkard as a wicked rather than an unfortunate person, and consequently a fit subject for righteous persecution.

From a secure hiding place they watched the colonel look around to see if the coast were clear, and then reach through a broken board in the fence for a jug. They dared not say a word. With a practised swing, learned years before in the harvest field, he lifted it upon his right shoulder, pulled down the mouth to his lips, drew in his breath and took a long and loving draught. The next instant, with a sputtering yell, he leaped into the air, dashed the jug in pieces on the ground, stared one instant at a few damp bees struggling in a little pool of oil, and then, with a wild shout, fell prone on his face, writhing in a fit of delirium.

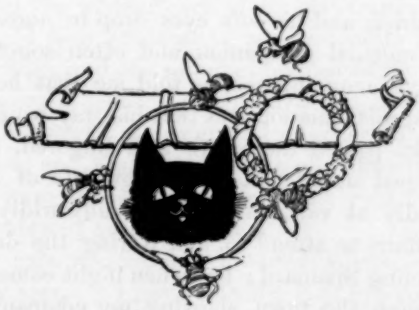
Luckily for the colonel, the terror-stricken boys, in their flight, spied old Doctor Dinwoodie coming down the street in the squat little buggy that had been built to fit snugly his single enormous figure and to contain beneath the seat his capacious medicine chest. It took but a few seconds for the quick-witted ex-army surgeon to grasp the urgency of the situation from the boys' disjointed exclamations, and, lashing his horse, he turned into the

alley at a speed and on a curve which would have overturned a larger vehicle or a lighter man, and leaped to the ground beside the now exhausted and unconscious inebriate.

The colonel was apoplectic in the face and frothing at the mouth. The doctor whipped out his lancet, bled his patient, and then pried open the clenched jaws, allowing a half-dead bumblebee to escape! The boys had run up by this time, and explained, and the doctor, roaring with laughter, exclaimed: "Now he only needs a wick down his throat to burn like a campaign torch!"

Then he remembered the dignity and circumspection due his position as a physician and added: "Boys, if you ever say a word about this, you'll not only get a licking from your daddies, but I'll give you a dose, the next time you're sick, that'll make you think you've got a whole nest of bumblebees fighting in your little insides. The colonel is so proud that he would never hold up his head again, if this story got out."

But the story did not get out during the lifetime of the colonel, who could never again look with equanimity upon a bee or a jug. In time he won back his old law practice and the esteem and respect of his townsmen, and died only last year, a judge of one of the highest courts, and an unconscious testimonial to the efficacy of the bumblebee cure.



The Scarlet Handkerchief.*

BY T. H. CHALMERS.

HE old adage that "A rolling stone gathers no moss" was exemplified in my case up to the time I reached Truxillo, Honduras, in the sixties. There I was taken down with the dreaded Caribbean fever, which left me a physical wreck, but, having become acclimated, I resolved to make the city my home, and embarked in an enterprise which brought me a competence.

Truxillo is a strange place, with a mixed population of Spaniards, Mexicans, and Americans; and now and then a half-naked Carib may be seen basking in the sun in front of some one of the numerous low drinking dens with which the town is cursed.

One morning I awoke to the fact that the little hotel where I lived had a new boarder, a youth of the genuine Spanish type, with a pale face, dark eyes shaded by long, soft lashes, slender hands, and a low, well-modulated voice.

This person called himself Emilio Concha, and appeared about twenty years of age, perhaps less. In spite of his youth and inexperience, however — at the slightest worldly remark his cheeks would flush, and his soft eyes drop in embarrassment — I found him a congenial companion, and often sought his society. After a few days' acquaintance, he told me that he had come to Truxillo on a special mission and that his stay would be brief.

But as weeks passed the youth still lingered, and, strangely enough, developed an interest in the low life of the place that seemed decidedly at variance with his unworldly character. I had my own affairs to attend to, and during the day did not see much of the young Spaniard; but when night came I would stroll with him through the town, showing my companion sights and scenes which seemed to delight him.

"I should like to see Captain Vasco," said he to me one night.

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"I have heard so much about him that I have a desire to see this celebrated person."

I then told him who Captain Vasco was, — a man whose crimes had rendered him notorious throughout the Central American States, and added that he was not a fit associate for a law-abiding man.

Emilio shook his head and smiled. He would see the famous desperado just the same, — the cowardly assassin who had killed his dozen, old and young, he said; so, seeing that I could not curb his desire, I took him to The Eldorado, the gilded gambling den of Truxillo, and let him see Captain Vasco at his favorite table and game.

A tall, dark-faced man was this terror of Truxillo. He affected rich garments, and while he played, his sombrero, half filled with gold coin and crossed by a cocked revolver, lay on the floor at his feet.

I watched Emilio's face while he studied Vasco's physiognomy, and saw all color leave it. The dark eyes shone with a steely glitter, which in a twinkling destroyed all their softness, and his hands shut spasmodically at his sides. Perhaps he hated Captain Vasco on account of his numerous cruelties — I could think of no other explanation at the time. At any rate, when we left the place my friend seemed satisfied, now that his curiosity had been appeased.

The days that passed served to increase my regard for the boy, while deepening the wonder excited by his strange moods. Now and then I would hear snatches of music coming from the room occupied by Emilio, and the sound of a voice sweet and melodious as that of an operatic tenor. Again all would be silent for hours.

One night, five weeks after our first meeting, my door was suddenly burst open, and Emilio Concha stood before me.

His cheeks were deeply flushed, and his eyes seemed to flash forth the concentrated hatred of years.

"You must help me, señor!" he cried, advancing and laying his hand on my arm. "I have selected you, for you are the only friend I have in Truxillo. Surely you will not desert Emilio Concha when he needs help."

"But what has happened, boy?"

"Captain Vasco has challenged me."

I was thrilled as I had never been thrilled before. I looked at young Concha and thought:

"Impossible! What, Captain Vasco seeking a duel with this fair-faced boy? I know that he is a blackened villain, but surely he would not pick a quarrel with my friend."

"It is true," smiled Emilio, seeing my look and seeming to read my thoughts. "I provoked Captain Vasco. I threw a lot of coin which was on the gaming table into his face."

"You, Emilio? In heaven's name what possessed you?"

"A desire to fight this monster!" was the calm answer; and there came to the boy's face — I could not regard him as anything but a mere boy — a look that horrified me. "It all passed in a moment. It happened at The Eldorado. I sought him there; he was in his old place, at the octagonal table, playing, with the half-filled hat at his feet. I watched him as long as I could, and, stepping forward, I gathered up a handful of his own coin and struck him fairly in his bearded face with his spoils.

"You may be sure that little act of mine created a sensation," continued Emilio. "He turned two colors in the space of a second, and I waited for the challenge. It came slowly, for he is a coward at heart; nothing but the presence of his companions forced him to speak. He knew that unless he challenged me he would lose his prestige forever. I accepted at once. We meet at midnight on the beach of the bay. The moon will be at its best then."

"Are you mad, boy?" I exclaimed. "They say that this man is a dead shot; that he has killed at fifty paces and by starlight!"

There appeared a serpent-like glitter in the depths of the youth's Castilian eyes, and for a half second he turned them away, trembling violently, but suddenly he became cool again.

"It must be," he said. "You must second me, señor."

Then, as now, I abhorred duelling. But, according to the unwritten law of this community, to refuse such a request meant dishonor. So I promised Emilio that I would not desert him.

Soon after we separated — Emilio going to his room directly over mine, from which I again heard proceeding strains of soft music and a sweet plaintive voice — I was visited by a fellow

who announced that he was the captain's second,— a man after Vasco's own heart, a wiry little Mexican who looked as villainous as his chum and master.

Emilio had told me what to say to this man, knowing that he would come, and so we agreed amicably to the proposed terms of the meeting. I noticed that Sanchez started when the distance was mentioned, exclaiming that he had never heard of such a duel as this, but when I reminded him that my principal had the right to choose he subsided, and we concluded arrangements.

As the singing in my friend's room had ceased, I fancied that he was writing some letters which would doubtless be left in my charge to be mailed or delivered in case he fell before the revolver of Captain Vasco; but later, when he came lightly down the stairs and entered my chamber, with a calm smile on his oval face, he handed me nothing of the kind.

We talked till near the appointed hour.

"Come," said he eagerly, "it is time that we started for the beach. I want this thing over before I sleep."

I looked at him, surprised. "Before you sleep?" thought I. "Poor boy, you don't know the deadly aim of this master of the trigger; you don't know that he never misses."

It was a night of nights. The moon, hanging like a great silver shield in the heavens, showered her light upon the long, low stretch of beach, from which one could see the restless waves of the bay tipped with silver as by the brush of some marine artist. It was a lovely sight, and I looked at Emilio as we approached it to see if it did not in some strange manner affect him, but his face showed no signs of emotion.

For some minutes we walked the beach alone, Captain Vasco and Sanchez not having arrived, and I waited for Emilio to tell me why he had sought this meeting. Again and again I tried to lift the curtain of mystery, but each time I was baffled, and at last I came to the conclusion that on account of some love affair the boy had determined to seek death by the pistol of this dreaded desperado. I could see no other solution to the puzzle.

Presently Captain Vasco, his second,— the villainous-looking Sanchez,— and the surgeon appeared.

I noticed that Emilio watched them with suppressed eagerness

as they silently approached, their figures casting strange shadows on the silvery sands of the beach.

Captain Vasco had put on a new suit of clothes. He had girded himself with a fiery red sash which hung along his limbs, flashing with embroidered stars and what-nots, while his sombrero was also new, its band being the skin of a coral snake.

I advanced to meet Sanchez and complete the few grim preliminaries to what my sinking heart told me would prove a ghastly tragedy. We tossed a broad Mexican dollar for choice of position, and I won, electing to place my principal where, when he faced his practised adversary, he would stand with his back to the moon, whose beams would fall brightly upon Vasco's glittering trappings. We scored a deep scratch in the firm white sand, at which the duellists were to be placed, back to back. At the word they were each to walk forward ten paces, wheel, and, without further warning, fire.

As Vasco drew near he assumed an air of bravado, but a slight twitching of his lips betrayed an anxiety that he could only partly conceal. To my astonishment, as Emilio stepped to the line marked in the sand, Sanchez approached me and said:

"If your principal will offer a suitable apology, Captain Vasco will spare his life."

"Never!" exclaimed the boy, and as he spoke he drew forth a large handkerchief of scarlet silk, such as Mexican peasant girls bind around their jetty tresses. In one conspicuous spot the scarlet of the silk was dulled to a reddish brown, and one corner bore an initial embroidered in white. These details were quite noticeable in the brilliant moonlight.

Captain Vasco, who looked gigantic as he towered above his slender, boyish antagonist, started perceptibly at the lad's quick motion, and, it seemed to me, paled a trifle when Emilio suddenly leaned toward him and murmured something inaudible to all but the terrible gamester.

My heart stood still as I stepped back to give the signal. The incoming waves seemed to sound a solemn death-knell for the boy who had grown so dear to me. I waited as long as I could, the fatal word trembling on my lips, though I saw that it could be spoken none too soon to suit Emilio Concha.

As the last numeral dropped from my faltering tongue, the tall desperado stepped briskly but nervously off, measuring his ten paces as though shod with seven-league boots, while the short, dainty steps of Emilio carried him scarcely more than half the distance. But the time occupied was exactly the same, to the fraction of a second, and simultaneously the shots of the heavy pistols sharply broke the silvery silence.

For an instant I shut my eyes, not wishing to see the young Castilian measure his length on the sand; but when I opened them, lo! there stood Emilio as erect as a soldier, while on his back, staring at the sky which he would never see again, lay Captain Vasco, the "Black Vasco of the Hills."

Emilio came toward me while the surgeon and Sanchez bent over the body. He laid his hand in mine; it trembled not, and we walked back in silence.

"I will go back now," he said, when we had reached our little hotel. "I have carried out my oath."

"Your oath! Then you —"

Emilio drew from his bosom a dainty card, which he extended while he narrowly watched my face.

I took the card, and, bending toward the light, read thereon the name of "Inez Castelar."

The mystery was explained; my boy was a young woman, and I could now account for the soft eyes, the sweet voice, the blushes, and the pretty hands.

"My brother, a mere boy, was robbed and cruelly murdered by the man we have just left on the sand," said she. "I sought him for vengeance. I challenged him, knowing that he was a cowardly assassin who had never in all his life dared meet his victims face to face. When I showed him his blood-stained handkerchief, and in a whisper told him who I was, I unnerved the villain and destroyed his aim. I have avenged Bártolo, and, señor, as long as I live I shall remember your friendly service. Let this be your keepsake," and there fell into my lap with the softness of a rose-leaf the scarlet handkerchief.

Parker's Polar Plasters.*

BY ERIN GRAHAM.

MY friend, Henry Parker, is a scientist, and a man of intellectual weight. But last summer there arose a certain coolness between us, all owing to Parker's polar plasters. For some time I remained silent on the matter, but finding my silence misunderstood, I consider it incumbent on me to vindicate my sanity.

Last year, in the month of January, I first met Frances Rolfe. Our meeting took place at a literary club, where the members discussed Browning's "Sordello" or raved over Omar Khayyam. I am not an up-to-date literary man, as I still find interest in "Ivanhoe" and amusement in the Pickwick Papers. My friend Parker, who has literary, as well as scientific aspirations, persuaded me to attend the "Lotus Club," and, after I met Frances Rolfe, I paid the membership fee with gladness. I lived in fear of being called upon to write a paper on Ibsen or express an opinion concerning the psychic insight of George Meredith. But there were a few in the club who were more than willing to do all the talking, and I was content if I had five minutes' chat with Miss Rolfe as we sipped the strong coffee and took timid mouthfuls from the dainty sandwiches that supplemented our intellectual researches. By the time that the March gales were at their loudest, my acquaintance with Miss Rolfe had so favorably progressed that I was allowed to call once a week at the substantial mansion owned by my fair one's father. I became known to the family circle, and was tolerated as a young man of steady habits. The elderly Rolfe was a short, fat gentleman, with sandy hair, who had decided political views and who snored loudly in the evening. Mrs. Rolfe was a gentle, dignified woman, who was to be desired as a mother-in-law. Frances had no sisters, but there were two brothers, who

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seemed to regard me with hostility. The elder — Stuart — was a member of the club and was exceedingly fluent in the literary warfare that sometimes took place. He looked upon me as a Philistine, and coolly surveyed me through a pair of pale blue eyeglasses when I ventured to praise the dramatic power of "She Stoops to Conquer." But, if not the rose, he was a blood-relation to the rose, and I meekly endured his patronage, while I promised myself vengeance in the future. The other brother — Ted — was thirteen years of age, and was possessed of a marvellous appetite and an utter lack of reverence for age or lovers. His knowing smile, when I encountered him in the hall, was unpleasant, and I am almost certain that he appropriated the box of expensive chocolates that I sent Frances on St. Valentine's Day. One day, after I had bought a bouquet of crimson roses and duly despatched it to Miss Rolfe, I was disgusted, on meeting young Ted on High Street, to discover that one of the choicest buds adorned his coat. He caressed it, as I drew near, and grinned in a manner highly unbecoming one of his generous features. These annoyances, however, were but the crumple in my rose-leaf, and the course of my true love was smooth enough to satisfy the most exacting lover.

Frances was a dark, stately young woman, whom no one called "Fanny." I was quite convinced that her cold manner concealed an affectionate nature, and, of course, I was the deserving man on whom this wealth of affection was to be bestowed. But the love of a dark, reserved young person is not to be won in four short weeks, and I found myself postponing the eventful moment when I should pour forth the tale of my devotion in polished and effective English. Easter came, and costly offerings of lilies were sacrificed at the shrine of my goddess. May smiled on us, and we took long drives in the country, where apple-blossoms wrapped us in their fragrance. June, the bridal month of the year, inspired me with fresh courage, and, on the very last day of that month, I made my state of mind and heart quite plain to Miss Rolfe.

The proposal was quite different from the ideally elegant affair that I had planned. I had thought that I should breathe my tender story in a garden, to the accompaniment of moonlight and roses. I thought, also, of quoting a few lines from the last part of

Tennyson's "Princess," as I knew that might appeal to Frances' literary taste. But it was all said in hoarse and stammering jerks, and there was no moonlight at all — only a dismal rain that seemed to dampen my spirits. However, Frances overlooked my incoherency, and even gave me the shadow of a smile. But she was entirely non-committal, and I could not exact any admissions as to her own preferences. She was too cultured to resort to such hackneyed common-places as "really too sudden," and "I never thought of this, I'm sure." She replied with sweetness and decision:

"Mr. Kerr, I assure you that I appreciate your feeling towards me. But this is a very serious promise that you ask for, and you must give me a week to think over it. I like you, as a friend, but I cannot tell you now of my own feelings. Please do not see me at all until a week from to-night."

I knew that it would be of no use to protest, and I departed feeling wretchedly uncertain about my future, for Frances was almost as hard to understand as Caledonian fiction. As I left the room, I heard a chuckle from behind the curtains, and I was afraid that I could detect Ted's unclassical profile. My suspicion was confirmed the next morning, when I received a small parcel through the post, containing a clumsy pewter spoon. That wretched boy had heard my declaration, and would, no doubt, render my darling's life a burden during the coming week. And what utter coarseness, what lack of delicate humor was there in a boy who could see anything amusing in sending such a gift to me! I had been a sensitive, high-souled boy, who would have scorned to listen to lovers' sacred communings.

The following week was, to me, a season of torture. I worked with vicious energy all day, and made myself disagreeable to the boarders. Parker had a room adjoining mine, and one evening he protested, after I had played a "requiem" for the fifth time on my violin. He came in, without knocking, and rudely tore my instrument from my grasp.

"For Heaven's sake, Kerr, don't give us any more of that dismal stuff. What has been the matter with you for the last few days? Life isn't worth living within a mile of you!"

This was not polite language; but Parker means well, although

he is not a man of fine feeling. I was tired, hot and unhappy. I would tell him of my woes, and perhaps his sympathy would do me some good. So, after making him vow not to say anything about it, I informed him that I had a profound regard for Miss Rolfe.

"Is that all? Why, I knew that months ago. Any man, with half an eye, could see that you were an awful fool over her from the first."

"Eh? You don't mean to say that I've looked as if — that is, that I've appeared very friendly."

"Ha! Ha! That *is* a good one. You have looked positively idiotic, at times, I assure you. But never mind! Miss Rolfe is a tremendously fine girl. I know what it's like, for I was in love with my cousin Clara three years ago, and thought it was all up with me when she married Jack Ferguson."

"That was too bad," I murmured sympathetically.

"Oh! It's all right now. I saw her last summer with her husband and their small daughter. Clara had gone off dreadfully — her hair was thin, her complexion was faded, and her temper was simply frightful. The baby was a homely little beggar. I tell you, Kerr, there's nothing worse for a man than marrying his first love."

I did not exactly approve of Parker's remarks, although his last statement struck me as very sensible. Of course, Frances was the only woman I had ever *truly* loved; but there had been fleeting boyish fancies. There had been Katie Fleming, who really was a sweet little thing. She is a doctor now — a specialist in heart diseases. Then, there was that girl whom I met at Orchard Beach. Her letters were awfully clever, and I hoped that she was happy. Then there was Nellie Mason, who was a heartless coquette and utterly unworthy of an honest man's affection. But her eye-lashes were truly remarkable. They were very long, and were just touched with a kind of golden light that — but what, on earth, had I to do with Nellie Mason's eye-lashes? She was not my ideal woman, and I was most anxious for the days to pass, so that I might see Frances once more. Having told Parker so much, I proceeded to unfold to him the cause of my anxiety. He was properly respectful and again promised secrecy.

"You see I feel so unworthy of a girl like her. You must admit she is fine-looking, and so intellectual, too!"

Parker agreed and said:

"You needn't feel discouraged about the intellectual aspect of it. These clever women nearly always marry a man who is a regular idiot. Oh! I beg your pardon, Kerr! Of course, I don't mean that you are — that is — "

I tried to look dignified, but the situation was an awkward one. At last Parker broke the silence:

"One confidence invites another. I've a secret of my own that might interest you."

Parker's air of confusion aroused my curiosity, and I said in superior tones:

"I've suspected something of this. I suppose it's Miss Rothwell."

"Confound Miss Rothwell! It's more important than a woman. I've made a scientific discovery."

"Oh!" I blankly replied. When I saw the look of irritation on Parker's face I felt comforted, for he had certainly made a strange reference to my mental powers. I knew hardly anything about chemistry, and I had made only one call at Parker's laboratory. It was a place of darkness and vile odors, and I trembled, for fear he should ask me to pay a second visit.

"Of course, you can hardly appreciate my work. But chemistry is a marvellous science, and its study will confer great benefit on mankind." This sounded suspiciously like a lecture. "However, you can't understand it, so I'll not worry you about details. I have invented a plaster that is intended to provide comfort in warm weather. This plaster has a cooling effect, and no person using it can be uncomfortably warm. I don't know whether to give it to the world, for I don't care to make a fortune. It would be a great bore."

I felt disgusted with Parker's superior attitude. Any man would like a fortune, and I didn't believe in Parker's plaster. It had a cooling effect, indeed, and I was perspiring in pailfuls. I thought it would be well to test my friend's invention.

"Why aren't you wearing one yourself? It's too hot for comfort to-night."

He smiled in a wearied fashion, and, unfastening his clothing, showed me a greenish pasteboard affair, stuck to his chest. I felt humiliated.

"And does it really make you cool?"

He laid his hand on my damp forehead, and I sighed with relief. "Have you another one? I wouldn't mind trying it."

He stepped across to his room, and returned with another plaster. I became a little nervous.

"You had better let me apply it, Kerr. It must be dampened, before it is put on. I'll fasten it on your back, between the shoulders."

He smeared the plaster with some sticky material, and in a few minutes I was rejoicing in the effects of Parker's plaster. It really had a wonderfully cooling influence, and I looked at my friend with respect, as the perspiration ceased to gather on my brow.

"This is a wonderful thing, old man. Of course you must give it to the public. Just think of what good it would do the sick, who are suffering from fevers. You can become a millionaire in no time. How long does this cooling effect last?"

"About three hours. After that time, the plaster can very easily be detached. I am glad that you approve of it. But I want your word of honor, Kerr, not to speak of this, because there are improvements to be made."

"I'll not tell a soul about it. What are you going to call it?"

"I haven't thought much about it. It doesn't matter."

"But it *does* matter. Things must have attractive names nowadays. I'll tell you: call it 'Parker's Polar Plaster.' That sounds well. It's a shame that your first name is Henry, and not Peter. Just think of the effect! 'Peter Parker's Polar Plasters!'"

Parker did not seem to care for my alliterative suggestion, for he was always proud of "Henry." A man with that name would not be likely to behave himself unseemly.

"There is time enough for deciding about the name. Remember that it is a scientific discovery, and not an ordinary patent medicine. I don't wish to adopt a name unbecoming my profession."

Conversation languished after this remark, and I said "Good-

night" to Parker, feeling that his plaster had, in some strange way, exerted a chilling influence on my hopes.

The evening came which was to decide my matrimonial future, and I exhausted my store of ties, and also my stock of expletives, before I was satisfied with my appearance. I am, really, not a bad-looking man. I am tall and fair, and Nellie Mason once told me that I looked like a viking. A man always likes to be told that he resembles some famous fighting character. Even Parker told me, with a smirk of satisfaction, that Miss Rothwell thought him remarkably like Napoleon. He is no more like Napoleon than Queen Victoria is, unless Miss Rothwell referred to stature, for Parker is under-sized. But my face easily flushes, and I wished to appear before Miss Rolfe wearing the proper thing in ties, and an anxious pallor. The heat had continued, and my face resembled the red, red rose, which is all very well in poetry. I thought of Parker's invention and resolved to make use of it. My friend knew that my fate was to be put to the touch that evening, and I hastened to his room with my request. Parker, as I have said, is not a man of fine feeling, and he persisted in seeing something ridiculous in my position.

"You want a plaster, eh? Don't you think you'll feel cool enough before the evening is over?"

"I don't think that this heat is likely to decrease," I replied, stiffly. "May I have one of those plasters?"

"Certainly, certainly. Here are three or four. Take off your coat and I'll fix one for you. But I'm in a hurry. There's a meeting of the Atomic Club to-night."

So Parker attached one of his plasters to my back, and rushed off to the club, leaving me to finish dressing. The plaster did not seem to take effect at once, and it occurred to me that perhaps, under the circumstances, with the higher temperature and my increasing nervousness, two plasters would be more efficacious. So I timidly spread that ill-smelling liquid on a second plaster and laid it upon my chest. This operation took some time, and it was after eight o'clock before I reached the Rolfe drawing-room. The apartment was very dark and decidedly cool. While waiting, I arose and walked up and down, in order to keep warm. After I had engaged in this exercise for a few minutes, Frances appeared

— "a sight to make an old man young," and a young man speechless. She was dressed in white muslin — not the stiff, bristling muslin, but that which falls so softly that it looks like wreaths of snow. In the dark coils of her hair there was one rosebud, and a few spikes of mignonette were caught in her belt. She looked gentle, and I took courage.

"Frances," I said, as I pressed my hand over my be-plastered and fluttering heart, "is there hope for me?"

Of a surety, I had not been truly in love until then. Never before had I felt such a chill of suspense, such a sickening quiver through my frame. Frances must have noticed how my hand trembled, and, as she looked in my face, I saw that her eyes grew softer in expression.

"I feel that I can trust my happiness with you. I — I believe that I really care for you."

My confounded knees gave way, when I heard this reply, and I sank feebly into an armchair. Frances knelt beside me in alarm.

"Charlie, what *is* the matter? It was cruel of me not to tell you a week ago. How you must have suffered! Charlie, won't you speak to me? Your eyes look so strange."

"It's n-n-nothing. I'm just a little c-c-c-cold."

My head felt as if it were the North Pole, and my heart was hung with icicles. Could this be love, or was it too much plaster? If I lived to meet Parker again, there would be a scientist resolved into his original molecules or microbes, or whatever the things were. I was dimly conscious that Frances was chafing my hands all this time. It was maddening that an accepted lover should be in this state; but I was growing colder and death might come at any minute.

"Charlie, can this be the last? You must not leave me without a word of comfort."

At this appeal, I made an effort to overcome the terrible numbness that oppressed me, and threw my feet wildly about, while my hands clutched my darling's hair. Just then, a small form crept from behind a lounge, and I heard Ted shriek, "O Stuart! Murder! I believe he's gone mad."

Stuart Rolfe rushed downstairs, followed by his father, and I

heard the old gentleman say: — "Shocking for him to get a fit here! He must not be allowed to call again."

"It looks like epilepsy," said Stuart.

I was carried up stairs and placed in a hot bath. Gradually those wretched plasters detached themselves, and I began to recover. But it was all in vain for me to assure the elderly Rolfe that I had not suffered from such an attack before. I was afraid to explain about Parker's invention, for they might think that I had gone mad, and there was my promise to Parker to be kept.

So I was sent home in a cab at midnight, feeling that there were worse things than heat. The next evening I received a note from Frances, lovingly mournful, saying that her father was right — our marriage could not take place, but she would always be mine faithfully. I went to Parker and told him of the scene of the evening before, and asked him to go to Mr. Rolfe and explain.

"What kind of fool do you take me for? Do you suppose that I am going to be laughed at in every club in the city? Stuart Rolfe would never hold his tongue, even if he believed my story. I suppose they saw the plasters anyway. What did you say about them?"

"I told them that they were for a pain in the chest."

"Well, I am not going to have my invention ridiculed. You had no business to put on another plaster. It takes a man of science to understand the invention."

The cooler Parker became in laying all the blame for my misfortune upon myself, the angrier I grew, and we parted in a huff. For several days I was the most wretched of mortals, and ignored the existence of Parker. Then I determined to face the matter manfully. Since the cause of my disaster and disgrace would not say the words necessary to reinstate me in the good opinion of the world, I would go to Mr. Rolfe in person, and, keeping my pledge to Parker as faithfully as circumstances would permit, clear myself of the suspicion of being an epileptic.

I chose for my visit a time when I might expect to find the father of my lost one at home and at leisure, and was silently admitted by the domestic. How the very furniture and draperies of that cool drawing-room reminded me of my dreadful experience

of a short week since. It seemed an age. I was roused from my reminiscent mood by the abrupt entrance of the elder Rolfe, who, as I arose, greeted me with a bustling and effusive manner, almost pushing me back into my chair as I attempted to speak, exclaiming:

"Sit down, Mr. Kerr, sit down. Don't say a word. I know all about it, and beg you will overlook what was, under the circumstance, er, a — er, — a, — well, a not unpardonable misunderstanding!"

With these somewhat incoherent words he thrust into my hand a letter in Parker's peculiar penmanship. I always suspected Parker of trying to imitate Edison's chirography.

I must now do Parker the justice to say that he had penned a very satisfactory, though somewhat non-committal statement of the manner in which he had been instrumental in getting me into my ridiculous predicament, and by the time I had finished reading it, I looked up to find that the old gentleman had vacated the room in favor of Frances, whose olive cheeks were now slightly tinged with rose. She made no reference to our last meeting nor to her more recent note, and we both avoided the subject of the weather.

The Master Move.*

BY GEORGE E. GARDNER.

PSHAW!" exclaimed Colonel Jack, as he sprang to his feet in good-humored disgust, "I thought I had you, but it's of no use; you are the very devil at chess, Ned, and no mistake."

I laughed. The game had been my hobby ever since I could distinguish the pieces, and after my return from active service in India, a bachelor's life at a London army club had given me full scope for its indulgence. I took an absurd pride in the skill which I had at last acquired, and a proportionately childish pleasure when an adversary succumbed to it.

I had barely finished my laugh at Colonel Jack's petulance and was drawing a cigar from his extended case, when he suddenly dropped it and sprang towards the door, exclaiming delightedly, "Joe Chumleigh! By all that's good, I didn't expect to see you for a twelvemonth," and both of his hands caught in their sturdy grip those of a tall and stalwart man who had just entered the room.

They talked together a few minutes, then Jack laughed hilariously, as this old friend of mine always does when he thinks his idea a clever one, and led his guest towards me. "Captain Willis, this is my friend, Major Chumleigh," — we shook hands, — "he's a deuced good fellow, and that's one reason why I've introduced him to another. But my real motive is a baser one. Chumleigh is a crank on chess, and hang me if I don't want to see you beaten, Ned. You'd play billiards oftener and think less. Sit right down and defeat him, Joe, and I'll feed you as you haven't been fed for twenty years."

"Really, Jack, you will excuse me," said the major; "I don't care —"

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"Nonsense," interrupted Colonel Jack. "You love to play, and here's a man worthy of your metal."

"I have been fond of the game," the other answered slowly, and with some embarrassment, "but I haven't played for several months, and I hardly think that I shall again."

I looked at Major Chumleigh curiously. There was a puzzling intonation in his speech which set me fairly on edge. "I really hope that you will honor me with a game," I said. "I have not met with a master at chess for a long time. At least tell us why you play no more."

"As the alternative is presented," returned the major, "I suppose courtesy requires me to accept one or the other. Will it really give you pleasure to play with me?"

"Indeed it will."

"Very well," he replied quietly, as he sat down, "but let me assure you that it will be hardly pleasant."

"Why not?" I asked.

"I will tell you afterwards," was the answer, and the game began.

Less than half a dozen moves proved the man across the table a master: there were to be no false steps, no ridiculous blundering, no child's play here. With the sense which every skilled chess player has of his opponent's prowess, I knew that every atom of judgment, foresight, and resource which twenty years of training had produced must be used if I was to make even a resolute fight, to say nothing of gaining a victory. But on the whole he maintained a defensive attitude; finally his play weakened a bit, and in an hour I felt a reasonable assurance of success. The game was still far from won, but I could see my way clear, I thought, and my opponent seemed unable to balk me. All the time, however, I had a confused and uneasy consciousness that he was in some way leading me on in my play, a conviction which was strengthened when a peculiar move of his king seemed to invite the very *coup* I had been planning to effect by a slow and circuitous policy. I looked up in quick surprise; his eye caught mine, but whether or no he realized the consequences of his play I could not tell. At all events, it would certainly secure me the victory, and in full confidence I hastened to bring the game to an

end. Things went my way; one more move and Major Chumleigh, I was convinced, would be powerless. The play was made, and I leaned back in my chair and looked at my opponent with irritating complacency. He glanced at the pieces, then at me, thought a moment, and moved a king. The play was an unexpected one, puzzling, unintelligible, yet withal, it disturbed my plan. I reflected awhile, but to no purpose, and finally moved my piece almost at haphazard. Chumleigh followed quickly. In amazement and confusion, I stared at the table — there was no help for it. Again my opponent played — and I was beaten. And by a combination so deft, so cunning, so effective, yet withal so unnatural and grotesque, and so thoroughly non-human, though just why, it would be hard to tell, that its effect upon the mind was positively startling.

The major looked at me; neither of us spoke for awhile.

"Of whom did you learn that?" I asked at last.

"I learned it of no one. I merely saw it done."

"Please explain," I went on, more mystified than ever.

My opponent threw himself into an easy chair and lighted his cigar.

"I want you to look me squarely in the face, Captain Willis," he said, "and tell me if I look like a nervous man, the probable victim of hallucination, or anything of that sort."

"You are the last man with whom I should connect such notions," I replied, as I looked at his sturdy figure and into the keen gray eye.

"You are right. I haven't any nerves, and never had. The thing I am going to tell you about actually occurred. Of that I am sure. How, I don't pretend to explain."

"I came to England from the East a few months ago, after an absence of seventeen years, and my first thought, after seeing my friends, was to run up into the country for some hunting. I hadn't been in London a week when I ran across Smith, — little Smithie we used to call him at Eton, — and in the course of conversation I happened to remark that I wanted to find a box in the country where I could stop awhile.

"'I've got just the place for you, Joe, down in Surrey,' said Smith, rather eagerly, 'and you can have it, and welcome, as long

as you want. I can't lease the property, and I don't care to stay there myself.'

"'Why not, Smithie?' I asked.

"The old boy hesitated a little, shifted from one foot to the other, and then said in his squeaky voice, as though half ashamed of himself, 'Well, dash it all, Joe, the blamed place is haunted.'

"I laughed to burst, the idea was so funny, and little Smith's manner was funnier still.

"'Laugh away,' he spluttered, 'but go down there and you'll find out. Perhaps haunt isn't just the word, but it's curious, anyway.'

"'Tell me about it,' I urged, but not another word would he lisp.

"'I'll send the keys to your lodgings,' he said; and with that he was off.

"The keys came in the afternoon, and the next day I ran down to Surrey, directing my man to follow with some of my traps the next day. I arrived at noon, and found the place readily enough, a delightful little establishment, with trees, and shrubbery, and flowers, with a neighbor or two within easy reach, the parish rectory being just across the road.

"After dining at the village inn, I entered my new domain, which I inspected carefully from roof to cellar. No place ever looked less like the haunted house of story. It was a stone cottage and comparatively new, and everything about it was as trim and cheerful as one could wish. I went into each room, ready to feel any strange or uncanny influence, such as Bulwer Lytton tells of, but not a thrill or a shudder did I undergo. Neither were there gloomy old portraits or dusty paintings of any sort. Little Smithie's taste didn't run that way. The cellar was tight and well lighted, not a trap-door was found, and as for the garret — well, there wasn't any. I spent the whole afternoon in rummaging into every nook and corner, and when I went down to the inn for tea, I could swear that not a spot had escaped my observation.

"I did not return until ten o'clock. The full moon made everything as light as day, while the faint, sweet odor of the flowers, and the cheery ripple of a brook near by, made the

very idea of ghosts ridiculous. I concluded that the whole affair was a joke of Smith's, and as the dwelling was lighted by electricity from a private plant, I turned on every lamp, that no trick might be played under the cover of darkness. Then I went up to my room and was soon deep in certain figures. Perhaps an hour had passed, when, to my intense surprise, I suddenly found myself saying, 'Come in.' I knew that there had been no knock; yet I seemed to have heard one. Then I remembered that I had locked the door. I rose, turned the key, and was about to open it, when the knob was turned deliberately, and the door swung slowly open. But there was no one there. I confess it made me shiver a bit, for the motion was plainly caused by Something, though there was nothing to be seen. For there was no wind at all. But somehow I knew it couldn't have been that.

"The movement ceased; then as certainly and deliberately as before, the door closed. Curiosity got the better of alarm,— indeed, after a moment I felt assured that there was no cause for disquiet, inexplicable though the affair seemed,— and I opened the door, to see if it would shut again. But it remained motionless. Evidently my guest had entered. I looked intently about, but the glare of three incandescent lamps disclosed nothing. Not quite that, though. In one corner stood a small chess table. On this I now saw that the pieces were arranged in readiness for play. Yet they had lain in a heap when I entered the room; of that I was certain. I approached the table and dropped into a chair. Why it was I don't pretend to say, but I put out my hand and made a move. I was more than startled when, in a moment, a piece on the other side was played by — Something. But though I kept up a pretty lively thinking about the mystery all the time, yet I retained my chess faculty and played as I had never done before. My invisible opponent evidently thought well of me, for he, or she, or it, used great deliberation, and the moves were those of a master.

"Once, when my opponent's piece was about to move, to see the effect I placed my finger upon it. The movement at once ceased. Then I heard — though aware there was no sound — a voice say courteously, 'Excuse me, sir; I thought it was my turn.'

"'So it is,' I blurted out, 'I beg your pardon.' Then I looked

at the empty chair opposite, and felt a bit queer again. But the game was growing intensely interesting, and after a time I became so much absorbed in it that I pretty much ceased to think of the uncanny character of my opponent. Little by little I appeared to be getting the upper hand, and at last I saw that the pieces lay exactly as they had lain in a game I had once played with Tschigorin, and with a sigh of satisfaction I made the very play by which the great Russian had defeated me, and which he had pronounced unanswerable. I had won, and I gazed exultantly at the despondent space opposite. There was no move for a long time. 'Give it up, my friend?' I asked lightly. There was no response. But presently there came a play that puzzled me, a second that stunned me, a third that defeated me. Upon my word, nothing in the whole strange performance affected me as those moves did, they were so utterly unnatural, so beyond the power of man, as we know him, to conceive. They were the plays which you have just seen.

"I rose, shivering. Then there came a faint, pleased laugh, and something said, 'It's worth while dying to learn how to play chess. I will come again to-morrow night. We will play together regularly, if you please. Good night.'

"Then the door opened, closed, and I was alone."

"Did you play the next night?" I asked.

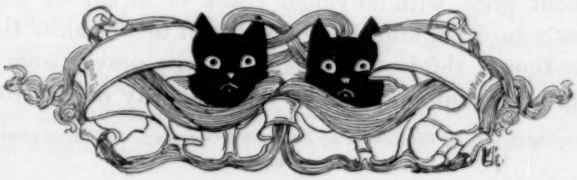
"Not much," returned Chumleigh emphatically. "I wrote to Smith that I was suddenly called to Yorkshire, and that his house was at his disposal. His answer was brief. It ran thus: —

"'Old man Jackson was a crank on chess before he died.'"

"But wasn't it all a dream, a mere trick of your imagination?" I suggested.

The major shook his head.

"Look at those plays," he said decisively; "a man can understand them. But invent them? Never!



At the Sign of the Wildcat.*

BY KATHARINE P. CLARK.

THE village nestled at the foot of frowning Wildcat Mountain. Just now it was buried beneath the February snows. For two days a tempest had been raging, and it was impossible to drive through the drifted valleys or over the storm-swept heights. The drummers had been gathering ever since the clouds first shut in. To tell the truth, the Wildcat Inn, with its great lynx-painted sign swinging in front, was so much of a favorite with the commercial travellers that they often departed far from the straight and narrow path of strict business virtue in order to visit it. In the whole state of Vermont they found no such beds, no such fare, no such welcome.

The host of the Wildcat was no jovial, commonplace country bumpkin. Tall and dark and stately was "'Squire" Pettingill, whose title had fallen to him not through any legal or scholarly acquirements, but solely because of his personal dignity and grand manner. When a drummer drove up to the door and tossed the reins to the hostler, just inside stood the 'Squire, who shook the new-comer gravely by the hand and himself conducted him solemnly to the office desk and inscribed his name. Then, if the guest and his tastes were already known, a singular volume, on the back of which was stamped, "The History of Baalbec," was produced from a mysterious cupboard in the rear, and the prohibitionists of Vermont might well have shrieked as the 'Squire, in his most lordly style, proceeded to fill a beaker full of the yellow contents of this square, intellectual jug. Then the guest, without money and without price, with no vulgar chink of dicker or exchange, was silently baptized into the fellowship of the Wildcat Inn.

By the time a third stormy morning rose grayly from behind the lowering mountain eight of the fraternity of the road had

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collected within the ancient inn's friendly walls, and the 'Squire was in his element. Everything that blazing fires and savory meats and speckless floors and linen could do for creature comfort was done.

Next door to the Wildcat stood a small, decent cottage, at the eastern window of which sat perpetually a straight, vacant-faced old lady. During the storm, one drummer said to another, "Queer! I've been here now, off and on, ten years or more, and I don't believe I've ever looked that way," jerking his thumb toward the immobile figure in the cottage window, "but that that woman has been sitting there. Sometimes she rocks a little, and sometimes she bends over something, like a book or some sewing, in her lap — but there she sits, summer and winter, rain or shine. She must be pretty old. I keep thinking she'll get sick or die, but she doesn't. She seems to be sort o' watching for something that doesn't come."

"So she does," responded the other, thoughtfully. "I've noticed her myself. Poor old freak!"

It was not a cheerful subject, and they dropped it.

Every night during the winter a more or less miscellaneous company of village loafers was accustomed to congregate around the great open fire in the "office." The bad roads and the pelting of the snow and wind on the night of the third day, kept all but one of these at home. He lived near and was known as "Hush" Kilduff — a boon companion of the 'Squire, whose most intimate friend he had been since their boyhood. It was said that old Kilduff had never anything to pay with, but "The History of Baalbec" was always freely at his disposal — too freely, alas!

In spite of the 'Squire's efforts, the day had gone rather slowly. The nearest railroad was five miles away. For two days, the mail-carrier had managed to struggle through the drifts, but on this third day no mail had come.

After supper the men ranged themselves around the fire, played cards, while old Kilduff slouched in a distant corner. The young fellows at the front had never heard him speak, except in monosyllables. It was said that he was not allowed to talk at home, and that he had acquired his sobriquet of "Hush" from the fact that his wife said "Hush" to him whenever he spoke.

Dobbins, who hailed from Troy and was in the heavy hardware line, told story after story and the men began to get warmed up. Fresh historical facts were imparted to the volume in the cupboard from a cabbage-smothered cask in the cellar. Anecdote after anecdote followed each other in sparkling, if not always edifying, succession. The howling of the storm-fiend outside was drowned by the merriment within. The hostler put on a vast log, which blazed up like a shower of meteors. In the light of it, old Kilduff suddenly began speaking. The men gazed at him curiously. Some of them had met him here for years, and thought they knew him, but they had not realized that he could utter a word beyond the commonest requirements of daily life — yet now he was talking like the best of them.

"You've been telling stories about pretty girls," he began, rather slowly, but with an odd air of eagerness and suppressed excitement, no doubt derived from dangerously close companionship with the "History" during the last two hours. "Now I'll tell you about a pretty girl the 'Squire and I used to know. She lived in this very town. Her hair was light brown — soft and fine, and curling in little rings around her face and in her neck. There were masses of it, and it rippled back from her face, and she wound it around her head in great braids. And her skin was this blue-white, transparent sort. There never was a girl around here with such a complexion. And her cheeks were pink — a good deal the color of these swamp-apple blooms that come along towards the last of May. I think of her complexion when I see 'em every year. Her neck was white and round and so were her arms. The girls used to wear low-necked and short-sleeved dresses all summer long in those days. 'Specially they wore 'em to church. She used to have a black silk dress and a blue silk dress, and when she wore 'em to church her neck and arms used to shine out so white that they would 'most make your eyes ache. She was taller than the average and pretty good size — splendid. I never read much about goddesses, but she was my idea of what a goddess ought to be. And she was good, better than the goddesses were, if the stories I've heard about 'em are true. And she was the smartest in the family — there were eight of 'em, four girls and four boys, all smart and good-looking and good

enough — but she was the smartest and best-looking and best-behaved of 'em all. Her father kept the village store. He spent as he went, but he was pretty well off, and Arabel Tenney — that was her name — had everything she wanted.

"By the time she was sixteen, every boy in the town was in love with her. When she walked along the village street, everybody — old and young, all the men and most of the women — looked and looked after her. It seemed as if when you once got your eyes on her you couldn't take 'em off. But she never seemed to notice it. That was one thing about her. She wasn't a mite vain — not a mite — was she, 'Squire?"

"No," said the 'Squire, in a deep, soft voice. He did not seem to know that he had spoken. He did not seem to realize that it was a queer thing that old Kilduff was talking. He only leaned forward, listening, just as all the men did. There was a passionate ring to old Kilduff's voice. It had a sort of magnetic effect.

"When she was eighteen, not only all the boys of her own age but all the single men in town were running after her. There was Denman Loop, called the handsomest fellow in town, good family, and his cousin, Lucian Trowbridge, a fine fellow, and Arabel liked them both pretty well. They quarrelled over Arabel. They are both alive to this day, but they never married and have never exchanged a word since.

"Then there was Sam Perkins. You know him. He keeps the hotel up in the Notch — no better in the State, unless it's the 'Squire's here. Sam Perkins was after Arabel for ten years. She never did anything to encourage him, but just talk and laugh and dance with him, just the same as she did with the rest of us — though he was wild after her. But she wouldn't have him, and he never could make up his mind to take anybody else. He drinks too much, Sam does," rambled on old Kilduff with a virtuous air. "He began it then, and he begged of her to save him, but she couldn't see her way clear to marry him, and there didn't seem to be any other way. A man told me only the other day that he never saw Sam's red face that he didn't think of Arabel.

"One summer when she was about nineteen or twenty, a new

fellow came to town. He was stopping up at the hotel in the Notch — a city fellow, sort o' run down, and up in the mountains for his health. He was used to having everything, a millionaire, they said, and he was certainly the best-looking fellow that ever walked the streets here. And his clothes! He had all sorts — a different suit for every day almost — and they fitted him as if he had been born in 'em, and they had grown along with him. He was tall and well-shaped, and he walked off with an air as if he knew everything in the world worth knowing.

"Well, he went into the store for something. Her father didn't often let Arabel come into the store — folks stared so at her — but that day she happened to be there getting something or other to take upstairs, and this city fellow was just carried off his feet by her. He ordered a lot of things and took out a big roll of bills to pay for 'em, and then he rode off. He had the finest rig that had ever been seen in the village.

"The next day he came back again, and went into the store, hoping to make her acquaintance.

"Just then Arabel came in and addressed old Tenney as father. She had noticed the young man as much as he had her.

"She turned as red as a rose, and stood perfectly still before him with her eyes cast down. Old Tenney said 'Arabel!' Then she lifted her eyes. I tell you there never were such eyes as hers — clear, and bluer than the bluest summer sky — but shadowy, with long lashes and beautiful curved brown eyebrows.

"Then the young man stepped forward, with his hat in his hand and said in his gay, free way, 'I see that this is your daughter, Mr. Tenney. My name is Walter Pelham. I am from Boston. I wasn't very well and they sent me up here to get better. I am very happy to meet you, Miss Tenney,' and then he shook her hand and began to talk to her.

"The family lived above the store and pretty soon Arabel asked him up into the parlor, though her father didn't like it much. He's told me about it over and over.

"The next day Walter Pelham drove up again. By a week more he had come over here to the tavern to board, and we all knew what had happened. There were a dozen or more of the best fellows that we had, who would have given everything for

one smile from her, and they saw now that they weren't of any account beside this stylish Boston fellow, though she hadn't known him but a week. Nobody knew anything about him, either, except that he spent money like water and hung around Arabel morning, noon and night.

"Those were the days when people all played croquet. When Arabel wasn't playing croquet with him, she was driving or walking with him, or sitting with him on the Tenney piazza, which was off at one side of the store.

"Arabel had always been the sweetest-tempered girl in the world, but now she was sweeter than ever, and always had a kind word for us fellows when we were off with her on picnics and rides — but that didn't make us feel much better, so long as she was engaged to Mr. Pelham for every dance. She didn't often go. He wouldn't let her, I suppose. It was dull for him, for he never looked at any of the other girls, and if she left him for a minute, he would go yawning around, as if he was bored to death. She seemed to like to be with him as much as he did with her."

The old man lapsed into a reverie, but nobody disturbed him. It was a full minute before the silence seemed to strike in upon him and start him up again.

"Well — it was in July when the young man from Boston appeared. By the first of September, Arabel was wearing five or six beautiful, shiny rings that he had given her. At church, she had a gold necklace on her white neck and bracelets on her arms, and forever young Pelham beside her, with his handsome eyes glued to her face, and always bending toward her and picking up her handkerchief and seeming to throw around her a sort of an atmosphere of worship. She stepped as if she was on air. I never saw her look so pretty as she did that summer. She seemed like these pictures of angels walking on the clouds. Her feet really didn't seem to touch the ground. The long and short of it was that she and that young fellow were in love with each other the way you read about. I never saw folks in love if they wa'n't in love — *both* of 'em; *both* of 'em. Ain't that so, 'Squire?"

"Yes," answered the 'Squire, with deep conviction.

"But I never could understand it — the end of it. His mother came — a proud, stuck-up woman, with fine clothes on — and then

they went away, and he told all around how he was going to Europe to study and be gone a year — but 'twa'n't a year, nor two year, nor three year. It was always — for he hasn't never come back."

"What! didn't he *ever* come back?" asked a drummer.

"No, sir, he never came back. For a while after he left, Arabel went around in a dreamy kind of way — smiled and dimpled and looked happy, but by spring she began to be different — sober and absent-minded and queer.

"That next summer she used to sit out on the piazza, and rest her hands on the rail and put her face down on them and look off up the road to the Notch. Sometimes she would sit there for hours. It looked as if she was watching for the young man from Boston — but he was in Europe, most likely. Anyhow, he didn't come.

"The next year Arabel grew soberer and soberer. All the fellows came along, one after another, and begged her to go to parties with them. They told her there wasn't any fun in the village without her, but she wouldn't go. They would send her presents of partridges and prize pears and everything they could think of. She would thank them and say that they were very kind, but she didn't seem to remember anything about it ten minutes afterwards.

"By a year more, she had grown to be queer. She would do whatever work she had on hand and then she would sit on the piazza by the hour again. She ate almost nothing, they said, and she grew thin, but I couldn't see but that she was just as pretty as ever. Oh, I used to be mad those days, and wish I could kill that young Pelham, wherever he was, and lots of other folks felt just as I did — but he kept away and didn't give us any chance. It seems he wrote one letter a little while after he went away. They said that Arabel carried that letter around inside her dress until it was worn out, and that what was killing her was the watching and hoping for another one, but there didn't any come.

"Of course, people talked. They said that Arabel Tenney had made a score of hearts ache and now she was only getting her pay. That didn't seem quite fair, for nobody could say she had flirted. She just couldn't help being so lovely that everybody

was struck all of a heap by her as quick as he looked at her. And nobody could blame her for falling in love with the young man from Boston.

"By and by she got so she couldn't go around the streets and pretty much all she said was, 'Is there a letter for me?' for now that she couldn't go to the post office, she asked 'most everybody that came along. Then we knew that her mind was getting upset. Her folks always saw that she had pretty clothes. To the last she was dressed as well as any girl in town."

"Oh, she died, did she?" asked one of the drummers.

"Oh, no — not — not exactly," stammered old Kilduff.

"Not exactly!" laughed the drummer. "What do you mean?"

"Well, she grew sort o' weak," went on the old man soberly. "But still she worked around the house a little every day and she would answer a question right enough, and every few minutes she would say, 'Is there a letter for me?' That went on for eight or ten years. Then her mother died. By that time all the children were married and settled, except Arabel and the youngest girl. She took care of the family. Arabel looked just the same as she always had. She didn't seem wild, nor like what they call a crazy person — but the only thing she took the slightest interest in was that letter that didn't come.

"At last, the youngest sister got married. She stayed on awhile and took care of the family. Then the father died. By that time Arabel had got to be thirty-five. There didn't seem to be any place for her to go to. None of the brothers and sisters seemed to want her. She saw how it was and they said she cried a good deal and didn't know what to do. Her father hadn't left much. Her share wasn't going to be more than a thousand dollars or so, and that wouldn't support her long."

The old man paused.

"Well, what became of her?" asked one of the drummers.

"Oh, there was one of her old beaus — he had always worshipped the ground she walked on — and he begged her now to marry him, and she did. It seemed 'most too bad, for she didn't more'n half know what she was doing, but he — Lord! he was glad. He had always been tickled to death if only she would let him sit and look at her — and he's taken care of her ever since."